

Slowing Entropy: Instructional Policy Design in New York City, 2011-12

How do policymakers craft policies, particularly centered on the Common Core State Standards, to be more resilient and less likely to disintegrate during enactment? Researcher Jonathan Supovitz in **Slowing Entropy: Instructional Policy Design in New York City, 2011-12** examines the design of a New York City Department of Education policy intended to engage teachers and principals across NYC with the instructional challenges of Common Core State Standards (CCSS). This summary provides an instructive backstory to some of the thought processes of the policy architects and provides insight into the way that careful policymaking can be more resilient to decay as it enters the rough-and-tumble reality of school communities.

A policy that focuses on implementation assumes that the policymakers know what should be implemented... Learning challenges, by contrast, have less specificity up front, and are intended to foster engagement with a problem, rather than the adoption of a pre-designed set of solutions.

Supovitz (2013)

FINDINGS

Characteristics of an instructional policy that will make it more resilient and slower to dissipate:

- » **Focus on a few manageable goals** that hone people in on your vision/ goals/priorities.
- » Make the focal activities high leverage by targeting the policy toward activities that are likely to encourage meaningful changes to instructional practices.
- » Ensure the focal activities **require an understanding of the larger instructional process**, thereby requiring a foundation of understanding to enact them.
- » Design the focal activities to **leverage prevailing organizational behaviors/ practices**, thus building on prior effort.
- » Anticipate the demand the policy will create and **get a head start on building resources and support networks**.

Implications for policy creation

1. Education policymakers never have more potential influence than when they are **crafting a policy**.
2. The way a policy is **framed and designed** has important implications for the way people receive and understand it, and the extent to which they respond to it.
3. Policymakers hold an **abundance of choices** about the ways they might frame a policy; the **language** they could use to communicate it; the **resources** they could expend to support it; and **how they choose to situate the policy** within other existing and planned policies and initiatives.
4. The choices embedded within policy design are essentially a set of signals that interact with a variety of influences, both real and perceptual, as it is received, interpreted, and enacted upon by its intended audience.
5. Creating a policy intended to **promote learning** is fundamentally different than creating a policy intended to be implemented in a specific way.
6. Policy **designed for engagement rather than implementation** becomes a professional development opportunity in and of itself.

“ It’s a fundamentally different way of thinking when leaders view an instructional change policy as a challenge of **learning** rather than a challenge of **implementing**. ”
Supovitz (2013)

CCSS enactment is an adaptive challenge rather than a technical challenge.

Adaptive vs. Technical

<i>Unknown Solution</i>	<i>Known Solution</i>
<i>Requires Innovation</i>	<i>Requires Prescription</i>
<i>Encourages Problem-Solving</i>	<i>Encourages Fidelity</i>

Extrapolated from: Heifetz, R. A. (1994). *Leadership without easy answers*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Questions? Find more info



Contact **Jonathan Supovitz** at jons@gse.upenn.edu.

Read the full report at cpre.org/slowing-entropy.

Subscribe to *Insights*, CPRE’s monthly e-newsletter.

The Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) brings together education experts from renowned research institutions to contribute new knowledge that informs PreK-16 education policy and practice. Our work is peer-reviewed and open-access. **Visit cpre.org**.